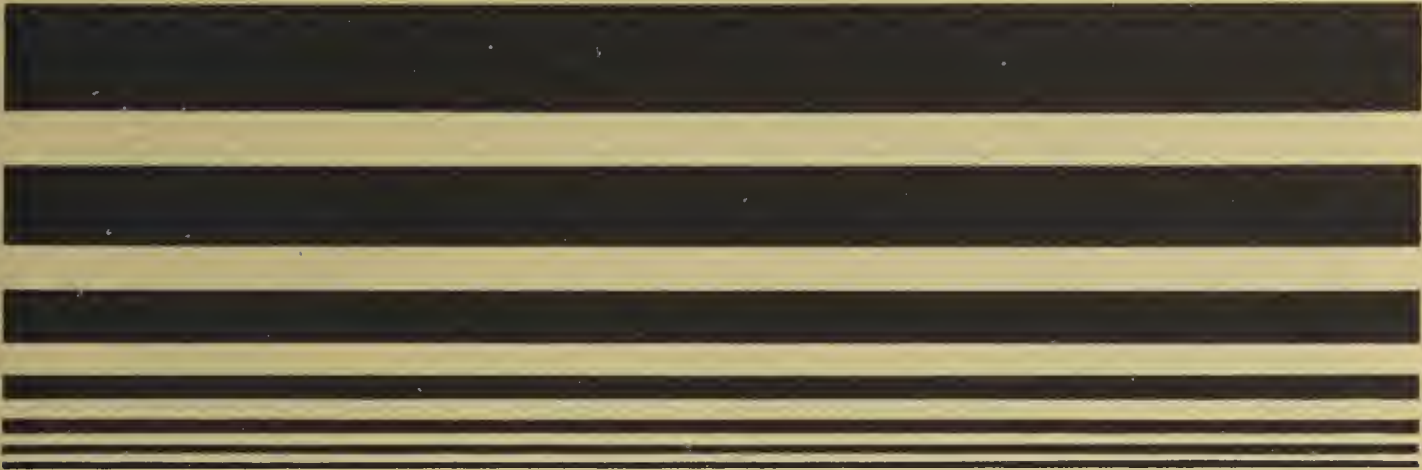




EXPLORATIONS

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Note: We have resumed numbering *Explorations*. The original issues, 1953–59, were numbered 1–9. The issues which appeared in *Varsity Graduate* from Summer 1964 to Christmas 1967 were not numbered.

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This photograph is from an article by Arthur Hurst in *The Canadian Journal of Optometry* for April, 1964. Hurst discovered that tv child had a near-point reading distance that made visual convergence impossible. The tv child is in fact a 'Cyclops' who increasingly uses one eye both for reading and ordinary vision. Paradoxically, the other eye ranges peripherally, like that of a hunter.

The one-eyed child, in losing convergence, naturally finds no great relevance in reading but compensates for his difficulty by developing the visual habits suited to the total field of the hunter. Near-point working distance is officially thirteen to sixteen inches, and school furniture and text books are accommodated to this theoretic norm. Some educationists, on discovering that the near-point is only 4.6 inches, simply brush aside the fact by mentioning that reading is no longer the main concern of the child in advanced school. The child now tends to transfer his activities from reading to manipulatory work, making his own books and dictionaries.

Preliminary Observations on Breakdown as Breakthrough

The 1929 crash revealed the world of economic processes to the entire community.

Soul City and the rise of black power is a social and political breakdown that reveals the character and processes of color TV as well as the black population.

The breakdown of communications in the Pueblo episode revealed the discrepancy between hardware and software, between 19th century bureaucracy and current electronic means of surveillance.

The generation gap revealed the nature of identity. That is, once personal or social image has been scrapped by new technology, it can only be recovered by violence and suffering.

The atomic bomb as overkill was a breakdown of war and diplomacy alike, revealing many hidden processes in the body politic.

The speed-up of travel created jet city or the planetary city of circulating inhabitants. This speed-up is also a breakdown of all metropolitan areas, revealing the meaning of cities as such, i.e. cities as efforts to concentrate and heighten human awareness.

Xerox, by speed-up and by decentralizing book production, has exposed the entire character of copyright and the publishing processes to public inspection.

Privacy is created by the public, as scarcity by affluence and the market. Imprisonment or enforced solitude reveals the nature of the public. Solitude reveals the nature of society, as electricity reveals the nature of the machine in the act of destroying it.

Jazz and syncopation riding the new radio waves revealed the nature of civilization as a world of continuity by recreating the syncopated tribal world of a closed society.

The cool TV medium revealed that Miami and Chicago were the breakdown of American political parties and hot machine politics.

Cool TV political coverage of old hat processes revealed the natural bias of the newspaper for hot news, i.e. bad news. Bad news provides the reader with the survivor thrill. Newsmen dislike cool characters.

TV GUIDE for February 8–14, 1969, does a real snorkle job under the heading: 'Ever Since Chicago: TV in Turmoil' — from a snorkle level they manage a massive intellectual burp: 'If people lose faith in TV news, how long will it be before they lose confidence in TV advertising?'

Miami and the Siege of Chicago by Norman Mailer: Instead of considering the nature and the effects of TV on human perception, Norman Mailer laid down a huge smoke screen. Mailer's ignorance of media effects is matched by that of Mayor Daley who is described by Mailer as 'ready to take on the electronic wrath of the semi-conductors of the world, his voter-nourished blood full of beef and curses against the transistorized cabals of the media.'

It is, of course, the old 19th century rhetoric of the hot press medium that provides the moral indignation approach. It is precisely as if the medical profession mounted a verbal barrage of wrath against small-pox and measles. Such a barrage would be warmly welcomed by the press which desperately needs a large cast of citizens crammed with memorized scripts full of conflict and tensions.

Columnist Max Lerner matches Mailer's ignorance of media as a disservice environment when he states that there is a spreading suspicion among both Liberals and Conservatives that the wells of communication in the U.S. are poisoned. This diagnosis corresponds to the current idea of media-caused changes as "a world-wide Communist conspiracy."

As the cool medium of TV enshrouds the hot medium of the press it naturally erodes the old 'journalistic freedoms.' 'The child is father of the man.' Sam Butler put it differently: 'The chicken was the egg's idea for getting more eggs.'

The breakdown of the press bias for bad news would leave the bias of advertising for good news monotonously over-exposed. If bad news is indispensable to the purveying of good news (witness the sinking of *The Saturday Evening Post*), then it is time that the press had one last titanic field day before its bottom is torn off by the TV mike.

In their book *I'll Buy You a House Or I'll Dress You in Mourning* (Simon

& Schuster, 1968) Collins and Lapierre record the revival of bull-fighting in Spain as a direct and immediate consequence of tv. Until the late 1950's and after the death of Manolete, the bull-ring was in the doldrums. This unwobbling pivot of Spanish life began to warble as never before with the arrival of tv. Even more than soccer or football, the tv medium reveals the drama and skills, the courage and suffering of the participants. Radio may have been a break for Franco, and other tribal chieftains. tv was a breakthrough for the bull-ring. It revels in processes.

14.2.69

MARSHALL MCLUHAN

Apeneck Sweeney

*The lengthened Shadow of a man
Is history, said Emerson
Who had not seen the silhouette
Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.*

Mr. Eliot's fondness for jokes gets full play in this four line put-down of Emerson. Emerson is the perfect symbol of Boston's literate, rational, cultural *élite* and his straight line progressive vision of history is here delightfully ridiculed. Emerson is crushed between two worlds, both represented by Sweeney, the mysterious figure with the wild, crude characteristics commonly associated with the bog Irish who appears first in four poems published in the *Little Review* in 1918. At first glance he looks like a new barbarian crawling out of what Joyce somewhere called the 'afterthought of Europe' into the ruins of Western society. In 'Sweeney Erect,' the poem in which Eliot introduces his jazz-age tribal man among the wasps of Boston's Beacon Hill, he sets up a parallel between pre-literate Gaelic Ireland and the modern post-literate Boston world of the clannish Irish Mafia. Emerson had not imagined this 'missing link' between the two worlds. In the poem Eliot succeeds in spoofing the *literati* for being too interested in the pastness of past mythologies, too literal minded to recognize this refugee from the Celtic Twilight, who has taken over their world. Sweeney casts an unforeseen barbarian shadow over the world where 'the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo.'

Sweeney, the caricature caveman, becomes one of Eliot's favorite characters.

This essay by a fourth year undergrad, Michael O'Brien, is a major breakthrough in Eliot studies. i.e. It reveals the breakdown in the older pattern of faculty monopoly of advanced studies.

*Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees
 Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
 The zebra stripes along his jaw
 Swelling to maculate giraffe.*

Although Sweeney's appearances are always comic this aspect of his role does not at all prevent Eliot from using him simultaneously for serious purposes. He appears in *The Waste Land* and is the protagonist of a poem which seems to be a recasting of the theme of *The Waste Land* in dramatic form. Because of the importance Eliot gives him Sweeney's background and his role in the poetry are worth investigating.

In an essay on Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot expressed the view that the artist must in future use the mythical method as 'a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.' Eliot had earlier published a paper on myth and the modern theatre in Wyndham Lewis's *Tyro* of 1922. In it he had complained that though the theatre was 'naturally the best platform for myth' it was then – with the possible exception of the music hall – quite barren. It seems reasonable, therefore, to look for a mythical figure as the star of Eliot's own music hall drama, *Sweeney Agonistes*.

The mythical figure whom Eliot did use in his 'parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity' was Suibhne the Mad whose story J. G. O'Keeffe translated from the Gaelic for the Irish Text Society in 1913. The title of the Middle-Irish romance was *Buile Suibhne* [*The Frenzy of Suibhne*]. It tells the story of a mad Irish king who lives among the birds. The correspondence between the titles *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Frenzy of Suibhne* and between his fate and that of 'Sweeny Among the Nightingales' is obvious; but, a discussion of Sweeney as he appears in Eliot's poetry will help make clearer his relationship to the Suibhne of the Middle-Irish tale.

Many of the themes of the poem in which Sweeney appears are included in capsule form in the two epigraphs to *Sweeney Agonistes*. These epigraphs indicate to us that Sweeney is being pursued by Furies like Orestes and that he is alone in his awareness of the situation. The quotation from Saint John of the Cross [Hence the soul cannot be possessed of divine union, until it has

divested itself of the love of created things] hints that this awareness might be a necessary first step on the road to salvation.

One of the most obvious points about Eliot's Sweeney is that he is a figure in a waste land. He exists in a fragmented society with which he can not communicate. He associates with modern echoes of ancient ritual hunting:

*The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.*

Mrs. Porter, we later learn, is the Queen of Hearts, a madam. She and Doris and Dusty are birds like those referred to in 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales.' They are preparing for Sweeney's coming with a sort of perverted religious ritual. 'They wash their feet in soda water' in *The Waste Land* and in mustard and water in *Sweeney Agonistes*. In the Grail legends, the washing of the feet preceded the restoration of the Fisher King and Apeneck Sweeney, strange as it may seem, is a type of the Fisher King and himself, in his notes, indicates that all characters in *The Waste Land* are essentially subsumed under the one. In *Sweeney Agonistes*, Sweeney appears both as the sick Fisher King and as the Restorer.

Other of the characters associated with Sweeney keep reappearing from poem to poem. Doris in *Sweeney Agonistes* replaces 'Madame Sosostriis, famous clairvoyant.' She too uses 'a wicked pack of cards' and reflects Madame Sosostriis's comment, 'One must be so careful these days' in her remark, 'A woman runs a terrible risk.' Sweeney is a restorer of their waste land. He is the opposite of a hollow man. He is much more a 'lost violent soul.' Who else could be referred to in these lines at the end of *The Waste Land*:

*My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed.*

The lost violent souls are the ones who keep us alive. They are the opposite of the living dead, the hollow men who appear in *The Waste Land* as the inhabitants of the unreal city:

*We who are living are now dying
With a little patience.*

Sweeney, however, as we have seen has been shocked by the sounds of this city into some sort of awareness.

It is his capability for facing the inexorable reality of a situation that sets Sweeney off from the hollow man. Sweeney is like Mistah Kurtz who also lives in a waste land – the Heart of Darkness – and the announcement of whose death provides the epigraph for ‘The Hollow Men.’ Kurtz was ‘a remarkable man’ and had a gaze ‘wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up – he had judged “The horror”.’ Hollow men are incapable of anything even death. But Kurtz, who like Sweeney was a lost violent soul, dies after his succinct summation. He is like the Sweeney of *Sweeney Agonistes* who has found out the three facts of ‘birth, copulation, and death,’ the Sweeney whom Eliot described in the last essay in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* as a character ‘whose sensibility and intelligence should be on the plane of the most sensitive and intelligent member of the audience.’

Sweeney is in short a creature who ‘has divested itself of the love of created beings’ and thus taken the first step toward divine union.’ This type of growth is only kept available by Sweeney as a ‘lost violent soul.’ Hollow men are incapable of such movement. It is significant that three sections of ‘The Hollow Men’ had originally been called ‘Doris’ Dream Song.’ Doris in *Sweeney Agonistes* does not want to face up to the reality of life as it is seen by Sweeney:

*I don't like eggs, I never liked eggs
and I don't like life on your crocodile isle
That's not life, that's no life
why I'd just as soon be dead.*

Sweeney comes down hard at this point:

*That's what life is. Just is
Life is death.*

Sweeney then explains how he achieved his insight. It was through violence – murder. This theme of violence as a movement towards awareness is used again by Eliot in *The Family Reunion*. Harry, who is like Sweeney an Orestes figure, says this about murdering his wife:

*It was only reversing the senseless direction
For a momentary rest on the burning wheel
That cloudless night in the mid-Atlantic
When I pushed her over.*

While the violence itself is not the knowledge it is only the people capable of violence, capable in fact of any sort of action who recognize 'the horror, the horror.' These people force 'the hollow men' to recognize their situation. Thomas does this for the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Sweeney does it for the others in *Sweeney Agonistes*. Harry does it for the characters in *The Family Reunion*. These are the people, who unlike the hollow man Prufrock, are able to 'force the moment to its crisis.' Hollow men don't want to face up like Charles in *The Family Reunion*; they think, 'You mustn't indulge in such dangerous fancies.' But the violent man because of his action is pursued by Furies and is forced to recognize the situation. He has to work out a curse which eventually proves beneficial. It is through this curse motif that Eliot introduces what ends up as grace: a vision of the waste land reality of the natural world which is preparatory to the acceptance of the necessity for spiritual values, pre-evangelism, in the manner of the Book of Job. When one is forced to face hell, one then begins to look for heaven.

All these themes are involved in the two epigraphs to *Sweeney Agonistes*. Sweeney is under a curse like Orestes for murder and is pursued by Furies. These Furies are going to force him to face the horror of life on a natural plane, which, if we recall, is the plane on which we first find Sweeney in his bath instead of at 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Service.' The nightingale which Eliot uses to refer to Mrs. Porter and Doris also represents the Furies. In Sophocles's *Ædipus at Colonnus*, the Eumenides' sacred grove is full of the voices of many nightingales. Harry, in *The Family Reunion*, also associates the Eumenides with nightingales:

*In Italy, from behind the nightingale's thicket,
The eyes stared at me, and corrupted that song.*

Sweeney like Orestes is the only one able to recognize the horror, the only one able to see 'them' and he has certainly divested himself of the love of created beings as Saint John of the Cross requires. He doesn't make the final step towards divine union – these are fragments not a finished drama – but the ability to do so seems to be clear. He lacks the guide whom Harry finds in Agatha in *The Family Reunion*. She helps him make use of his own insight and to recognize the essentially benevolent nature of the curse he is under and of the Eumenides – the kindly ones. Sweeney, however, is still at the stage where he is afraid of the hoo-ha's coming after him. But at the end of the agon he is awaiting the hangman who is knocking at the door. We know from *The Waste Land* that the hangman is Christ who like Sweeney comes in the spring to devour us. Sweeney has succeeded in dragging the Chorus to consciousness with him. Like Thomas in *Murder in the Cathedral* and Harry in *The Family Reunion* Sweeney comes to wake those who would prefer to sleep. His suffering may save everyone. Agatha says to Harry:

*It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family
Its bird sent through the purgatorial flame
Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,
Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen
To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.*

Keeping these themes in mind we can return to the tale of Suibhne and see what Eliot found in it of interest. Suibhne is quite literally the Fisher King. At one point he describes himself rather poignantly as

*fishing in springtime
the meandering Shannon
Often do I reach
the land I have set in order*

These lines inevitably recall *The Waste Land*:

*I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?*

Suibhne comes under a curse because of his attack on the Church of Christ. He attacks the Church in the person of its priest, Saint Ronan, and its book, the Psalter, which he casts away, and its people one of whom he murders. Saint Ronan then curses him to life on the natural plane among the birds where he will live as any bird. Later his suffering is described as the inevitable result of a whole people rejecting the word of God from his Saints. This war against the word results in a barren life among the birds just as Eliot's waste land is the result of the secularization of civilization. The curse comes into effect during a great battle when horrible sounds of combat drive Suibhne from his companions to exile among the birds. O'Keeffe notes that this battle was of great historical importance in Irish history as was World War I to which *Sweeney Agonistes* is clearly linked. It was the sound which drove Sweeney to his 'birds' — Mrs. Porter and the rest. Suibhne then learns of the horror of life lived on a strictly natural plane. He is described as neither living nor dead and several times talks of himself as dead. He is pursued by horrible figures so reminiscent of Orestes' Furies that O'Keeffe conjectures the poet must have been familiar with Orestes' story. He experiences the horrible sense of isolation and fear which Sweeney suffers. Like Sweeney, he 'does a girl in.' She dies in the sea like Harry's wife rather than in a bath like Sweeney's girl. But Sweeney's mentioning of lysol points up rather crudely but clearly the possible cleansing effects of the murder. Suibhne is then afraid of the consequences and says so in words which suggest Sweeney's situation:

*for I am the most discontented and unhappy
creature in the world, for neither rest nor
slumber comes on my eyes for fear of my being
slain.*

The curse of Suibhne is under eventually works out to his spiritual benefit. He finds an adviser, much as Harry finds Agatha, who helps him develop his

spiritual insight and though he is murdered as a result of a sordid little plot he is assured of divine union before his death. The circumstances of his murder suggest the 'plot' of 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' where the Sacred Heart, Agamemnon, death and dung, are brought together in a very similar fashion. The raven which lurks so ominously in 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' is used for similar effect in the Gaelic tale when Suibhne's suffering is prophesied.

In the poems in which Sweeney appears Eliot was attempting to present a view of a formless, chaotic but highly energized world, the world after World War I. More particularly he was trying to portray the utter barrenness of a completely secularized society and the possibility for redemption inherent in its energy. The story of Suibhne offered Eliot the same sort of parallel to a modern situation as that provided for Joyce by the story of Odysseus. In his essay on Joyce's *Ulysses* Eliot points out both his and Joyce's common indebtedness to Yeats's earlier experiments with relevant Celtic mythological parallels. In the story of Suibhne the Mad Eliot found a parallel which permitted him to bring into a single focus his vision of the Boston Irish Sweeney and a much older Celtic figure, the hero of the Grail legend.

Excerpts from: **The Story of Comock the Eskimo**
as told to Robert Flaherty
edited by Edmund Carpenter



In the year 1912 I was in a little Hudson's Bay Company post at Cape Wolstenholme, the northeast extreme of Hudson Bay. Over breakfast one morning the manager of the post said, 'How about some hunting? We'll take the sloop and sail around the nose of Cape Wolstenholme. We might see something in the way of game. A walrus, perhaps, or possibly a bear among the cliffs.'

We started. We came to a ledge jutting off from the cliff face, landed upon it and, climbing up some fifty feet, sat down. I was looking through my glass at thousands of little specks, sea pigeons flying among the rocks of a nearby island. Suddenly on the water before the island I saw a small boat rowing toward us. It sprawled clumsily over the lumpy sea. It drew nearer. Its occupants were Eskimos. A man was steering at the stern, two others were at the oars. It drew nearer, close in. It was almost a third as broad as it was long, which was not more than fifteen feet, but within it we counted thirteen people, grown-ups and children, huddled together, and among them two dogs as well. Over the children and the dogs a woman held a stick to hit them if by moving suddenly they should threaten the balance of the cockleshell. Why the amazing craft did not capsize we could not understand, until I saw its

waterline, a series of inflated seal bladders tied at intervals around it. They alone kept the craft afloat. The Eskimos, their dogs – as wild as wolves – cowering between their legs, stared at us out of their twinkling slant-eyes. They looked like something half bird and half man for their costumes were not made of the usual deerskin or bearskin or hairy seal, but of the skins of the ivory duck, feathers and all, sewn together. They were not afraid. The mother's babe that she carried naked in the hood of her *koolitah* [parka] suddenly crawled halfway out along her bare shoulder, looked up at us for a few moments with big brown eyes, then stuck out its tiny arm and smiled. That broke the ice. I took its hand, it smiled again, the mother smiled and then the father, one of the finest looking Eskimos I have ever seen. He had a long, finely chiseled nose, a chin as solid as a rock and penetrating, far-seeing eyes. His hair hung to his shoulders. '*Chimo* [hi!],' he said. 'Chimo,' echoed his wife.

'Chimo,' piped the children. The mother twitched her shoulder on which the baby lay; it understood and smiled again.

'Who are you?' I asked.

'My name is Comock,' he answered, smiling expectantly.

'Where in the world have you come from?'

'From far away, from big island, from far over there,' he answered, pointing out to the west. 'You see, our *umiak* [boat] is not very good,' and he laughed and his family laughed with him. We took them all aboard and, with this incredible contraption in tow, sailed on back toward the post. He told me this story.

The dogs between sleep kept watching us and when we had built our igloo and from the inside cut out the door and crawled out, they were all around us howling for their seal. I had to use my long whip to keep them away, and then our wives crept inside and they were all smiling for they were away from the burn of the cold, and they lit our seal-oil lamps and put our willow mats and deerskins down while the children chewed their pieces of raw seal. Outside we gave our dogs their meat, and then they bedded themselves in the snow in the shelter of the sleds and the igloo, and let the snow cover them

again. Annunglung and I went inside, and our wives cut seal meat and filled our mouths, and we said the night was full of good signs, though there were growls now and then running through the ice, growing louder and louder as they came toward us, and sounding in our ears like Nanook the bear rushing toward the spear, but I said, 'Never mind, there is always growling from the sea.' So we fell asleep, cold though our igloo was, as a new igloo always is when there is no wind.

When I awakened I was happy, for our ice window was blue, and by that I knew that there was no snow-smoke in the air. My head wife made fire in her willow down, and she blew it into a flame and lit the lamp. 'Look at our children, Comock,' she said, 'they are warm.' There were little smokes rising from the deerskin robes under which they slept.

It was black with darkness, and I had to walk from one to another feeling their hands. We stumbled in our walking and fell down, but we held our hands and we got into the hollow of some big blocks of ice. We stood there until the light came into the sky and then we tried to see across the open water which was not far, but we could not see well, for it was covered with its own thick smoking from the cold. I was glad we could not see, for we could do nothing even if we did see our people and my wife still had her fits of screaming.

I went off to see the place where our igloo had been standing but there was only the smoke and water of the sea. Everything – all but one sled – was gone. All that we owned was gone – the willow mats, the deerskins, the



stone pots, the stone lamp for our snow melting, all my knives, spears, harpoons – everything gone. Then a thought struck me and I was truly frightened and I walked fast and I called out to my wife as I walked, ‘The stones, the stones – have you got them?’

The stones, did you say?’ asked my wife, and she stood still and she looked frightened.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘the stones, have you got them?’ Then quickly her hands went to the pouch in her koolitah. And for a long time she was feeling. And then at last, ‘Yes, Comock,’ she said, ‘I’ve got them.’ They were the stones we must have to make the sparks for our fires.

Then I said to my wife, ‘There surely will not be time for grieving now. Everything is gone. We have only one sled, my ivory knife with which to cut the snow blocks for our igloo building and your stones for fire-making.’

My wife said, ‘It is well, Comock, we have something.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘but no spears, no harpoons – we cannot kill bear – we cannot kill seal.’

‘There are the dogs,’ my wife said, ‘and there are the harnesses of the dogs that are gone. We can eat them,’ my wife said.

‘No,’ said my eldest son, ‘we cannot eat the harnesses. The harnesses they are gone. They were tied to the lost sleds.’

‘Well, anyway, there are the dogs,’ my wife said.

‘Ae,’ I said, ‘there are the dogs.’

‘Ae,’ said everyone.



Puppets and Greek Tragedy: The Dream Landscape

The connection between puppetry and Greek tragedy may appear to be, at best, obscure. It is, none the less, a connection which I have been pursuing with unabated ardor for twenty years, and which seems continually more promising the further my explorations take me. Puppetry is an art relegated, in the Western world at least, to seaside spectacles and children's parties. Its unique possibilities have always been recognized by a few – never by enough, unfortunately, to break down the barrier of public inattention. In 1964, at the request of a major university press, I wrote a book describing my work, and the relevance I had found the puppet to have to such dramatists as Sophocles, Marlowe, Molière and Racine. I was immediately attacked by one reviewer – an *aficionado* – for flogging a dead horse; my ideas, he claimed, had already been formulated by American puppeteers of the so-called revival in the twenties and thirties. I would be the last to quarrel with him. The fact remains that my book was unhesitatingly placed by the Lincoln Center librarian in the children's section. Obviously, a great deal of education has still to be done.

I was first drawn to the puppet – more specifically, the marionette – for what might be called archaeological reasons. My prime interest has always been in Greek drama, and, particularly, in the problems of reviving that drama for modern audiences. It is generally agreed that the problems are formidable. Time and sanctity have done their worst. No plays, perhaps, have suffered more from the aura of greatness. We attend Greek tragedy, most of us, out of a curiosity born of piety and scholarship. We are politely bored by what, we are assured, is a religious exercise. *Tedium laudamus*.

But even if one can surmount this barrier; if one can convince the public that the plays are valuable, and viable, and capable of speaking to the modern condition; one still must cope with the enormous problems of transposition. There are good translations, in plenty; some of them even actable. That barrier at least has been broken. But how does one mount the play? The

revival of any dramatic work is an act of translation which involves far more than language. A playwright works within a given set of theatrical conditions, and for an audience which brings certain preconceptions to the performance. These conditions and preconceptions change rapidly and radically. If our knowledge of the Elizabethan public playhouse were complete, and we could reproduce every vocal nuance and physical detail of the performances that Shakespeare saw, we would still have to face the fact that the audience has changed. Adjustments would have to be made. The intelligent director proceeds on the assumptions that guide the knowledgeable translator: the spirit is preferable to the letter.

The problems of Greek drama are particularly pressing because the poet was compelled, by the conditions of his environment, to use a theatrical grammar that is not ours. Nicholas Stuart Gray once wrote a play for children about a giant who was so large that he was invisible. This makes an acceptable metaphor for the fundamental difficulty of Greek play revival. There is one problem which is so enormous that it is rarely considered. It is, as it happens, the factor of size.

Ancient theaters were, by modern standards, enormous. This is a fact so obvious that we tend to ignore its full implications. It is, perhaps, something which has to be seen to be appreciated. One has to be present on the site – and preferably at a performance, at Epidauros, at the Odeum of Herodes Atticus in Athens, at Ostia, at Delphi, at Syracuse – to realize how this scale affects the actors and their audience. Conservative estimates give the Theater of Dionysus in Athens 17,000 spectators; in the fifth century, most of the population who wished to attend could have been accommodated at one performance. Epidauros held 14,000 in antiquity and rather more today, now that the *cavea* has been restored for the annual festivals of ancient drama. The theater at Corinth held, at the lowest estimate, 15,000. The conjectured capacity of others is little short of fantastic – 44,000 for Megalopolis, 56,000 for Ephesus. Of course, many were smaller than this. Delphi was of more modest capacity, and some of the deme-theaters scattered over Attica would have held little more than a few hundred. The fact remains that in the principal centers, for which the productions were originally designed, the acting space was dwarfed by the auditorium, and

the dramatist had to work with these proportions in mind.

In modern theaters proportions are significantly different. Northern climates are less sympathetic to the outdoor playgoer, and theaters must be roofed in. An enclosed theater means a smaller auditorium, and more complex stage mechanics need more space. To take a few examples at random, the old Metropolitan Opera House in New York held a mere 3,000, Bayreuth 1,300, the Salzburg Festspielhaus 2,300 and the Shakespeare Festival Theater at Ashland, Oregon (although an open-air theater) approximately 1,200. In this respect there can be no real comparison between the ancient theater and the modern, or between the tasks imposed on actors and playwrights of the respective periods. Obviously the Greek audience could see comparatively little. Only the broadest gestures of the actors would be observed. Facial expression, the modern actor's most important tool, was out of the question. Even if the actor had not worn a mask, it would have been impossible for the audience at the rear of the *cavea* to see and respond. They would receive only the most general impression of a character's movements and appearance; the chorus, similarly, would be visible only as a pattern of colored dots deployed across the surface of the orchestra, like a *corps de ballet* seen from the topmost gallery of an opera house. Most of the audience would have been conscious of the chorus not as individuals but as an integrated group. The mass effect would have been everything, and the small details of movement or appearance would have counted for nothing. When ancient, or modern, works are given today in the ancient theaters, the effect is the same.

In the Greek theater, therefore, the ear was more important than the eye. Acoustics were uniformly good, often excellent, and although the spectators could see little, they could hear remarkably well. The dramatist was compelled to rely on the spoken word for most of his effects. Any important point had to be made orally, rather than visually. The playwright's technique employed narration in preference to demonstration, for a significant piece of stage business might be overlooked and the point missed. This, then, is the fundamental difference between the Greek theater and the modern; where the modern theater is primarily a theater of sight, the ancient was a theater of sound. It has often been urged, for this reason, that the ideal medium for Greek drama in our time is sound radio rather than live stage performance.

The use of a totally oral medium places the audience in an approximation to the position of the Greek spectator.

When we revive the plays in the smaller confines of a modern theater, these values are significantly distorted. We can see more; we need to hear less. When we can observe the actor's face working, we do not have to be told that he is angry. When we can watch the characters going about their business, we do not need to be told what they are doing. Many lines and several stylistic devices, automatically become redundant. The recourse to rhetoric was a necessity to the ancient theater; it is not to ours. It is in the cinema that this problem becomes most acute. Significantly, Michael Cacoyanni's film of Euripides' *Electra* – to my mind, the only successful film of Greek tragedy yet made – achieves its effect by using only one third of the original text. The rest is replaced by visual images.

It is in this respect that the marionette becomes useful. In my performances I seek to restore the lost dimension of Greek tragedy by producing an equivalent of the distance that separated the audience from the original production. The play is seen, as it were, through the wrong end of a telescope. Once more, the characters are dwarfed by their environment. The puppet is limited by his nature to a small range of broadly expressive gestures. His face, like the mask, is immobile – though it has the great advantage of the mask, that the audience may project on it, through their imaginations, any emotion that the language suggests. Once more, the language must carry the play, and the action is restored, in every sense, to the proper perspective.

Other values suggest themselves. The Greek dramatist places his characters in a setting that was spatially and temporally undefined, and so infinitely flexible. Against the ubiquitous and anonymous scenic facade, the characters could create their own settings by language, and change these settings at will as the action proceeded. The unity of place which the Renaissance critics professed to find in Greek tragedy is, at most, superficial. Although the general sphere of action may be broadly defined, individual elements appear and disappear according to the exigencies of the immediate moment. What is the precise geographical location of Philoctetes' cave? And where exactly does Agamemnon's tomb stand in relation to Clytemnestra's palace? It does not matter. They can be conjured up at need, by words alone, or by an

allusion to one of the permanent architectural elements of the theater. When the need is past they vanish into the neutrality of the all-purpose background.

This scenic fluidity (most obvious, of course, in Greek comedy) communicates itself to the characters. They too can continually recreate themselves, in terms of their immediate emotional environment. The *non sequiturs* and breaches of logic common to both Greek tragedy and comedy that puzzle and infuriate the traditional critics and drive them to desperate feats of interpretation spring largely from this cause. Greek drama, like the *noh* play, operates in a dream landscape, where a character's function tends to be determined by who he is talking to, and where the chorus, particularly, may speak the thoughts of any character as well as their own.

Certain modern parallels for these phenomena of Old Comedy suggest themselves, but they are not to be found on the legitimate stage. One is radio, and particularly radio comedy. As was remarked above, the radio scriptwriter is substantially in the position in which Aristophanes found himself; because of the nature of his medium, he need acknowledge no limitations, and no containing factors, except those which he cares to create for himself, for radio drama exists in the individual moment and the auditor is denied the opportunity of looking back or forward. Thus we find that in the radio comedy which flourished both in Great Britain and in the United States during the 'thirties and 'forties, the same principles apply. It is the immediate joke that is important, and all else is subordinate. The same is true of more serious radio drama, for instance: the plays of Samuel Beckett which were originally created for this medium. Beckett's preoccupation with the importance of the individual moment in life is surely influenced, in some part, by the importance of the moment in radio. Aristophanes' world is that of the animated cartoon, where the creative artist can make his own rules as he proceeds, and change those rules as the need arises. The film on which he creates his images is blank; in space and time its range is infinitely extendable. Thus he is able to recreate the image for each individual moment, and again it is the immediate joke which is important, and nothing else. The cat chasing the mouse runs at full speed into the mousehole and his face is distorted out of shape. The comic point is made; when next we see him, his face has resumed its normal appearance. The cat is handed a bomb by the mouse,

and flames and billowing smoke fill the screen; the cat is revealed with all his fur burnt off. When next we see him, however, the fur has by some mysterious process grown again, and we are ready for the next comic incident. This is not extravagant or haphazard; it is, in fact, a measure of strict economy, for the principle is that an effect shall not be continued after it has outlived its dramatic usefulness. So it is in Greek comedy. Once a point has been made the author can wipe the slate clean and go on to something else. Modern actors who seek for a consistent character-interpretation are doomed to disappointment, for Aristophanes offers them no such thing. What they find instead is a series of different impersonations linked by a name and a few distinguishing traits. The same features appear, though less obviously, in Greek tragedy.

It is here that puppetry produces some surprising advantages. I should point out that I offer my performances as solo readings, taking all the parts – and telling myself that I am recreating the theatre of Aeschylus, who was his own director, choreographer and performer, as mouthpiece for his poetry. And in such a performance it is easy to interchange voices, to induce the same fluidity among the characters that the text suggests. A moment from *Medea* will illustrate my meaning. This is a play so symmetrically constructed that the second half presents, in reverse order, the events of the first – but from another point of view. In the first half we see a Medea who is passive, sympathetic, suffering. She loses her home, her security, her husband. At the end of her great quarrel scene with Jason, she is at the lowest point of her fortunes. Then the wheel turns. Aigeus arrives with his offer of refuge; and Medea, heartened, becomes active, revengeful, vicious. Her revenge is mathematically complete. She inflicts on Jason an exact equivalent of the fate he inflicted on her. At the end of the play Jason is reduced to the position in which she was placed at the end of the first half. He has lost home and family; he too will be driven into exile. Euripides reinforces this parallelism by conscious verbal additional repetition. I found in performance that I was giving it additional reinforcement by a device which was, at first, unconscious. My Medea and Jason had changed voices.

This is an avenue which must, obviously, be explored further, together with other aspects of the mechanical operation which suggest a thematic

relationship to Greek drama. Juxtaposition of human figure and puppet actor is worth investigating: so is the use of the half-seen figure of the operator to suggest the control of the characters by forces larger than themselves, as in the Japanese *bunraku* where the pitiful struggles of the characters against a system they are powerless to change are reinforced by the gigantic figures who manipulate them. The puppet theatre has traditionally failed to capture adult attention by insisting on regarding itself as a human theatre in miniature. The film has long since ceased to imitate stage plays. By exploiting the potentialities of its own medium, the puppet theatre could be as vital a communicative force as the modern cinema.

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A paper presented to a seminar held under the auspices of the Drama Centre, University of Toronto, Peter Arnott's marionette version of his own translation of Sophocles' Œdipus Rex was presented on the evening before this paper. Dr. Arnott said that he fully intended the marionettes to be an extension of himself as actor. His marionette Œdipus Rex, perhaps the outstanding theater event of this season, was dominated by the head and torso and arms and especially the hands of the puppeteer.